

Upon a nyght in sleepe as he hym leyde,
Hym thoughte how that the wynged god Mercurie
Bifrom hym stood and bad hym to be murie;
His slepy yerde in hond he bar uprighte,
An hat he werede upon hise heris brighte.
Arrayed was this god, as he took keepe,
As he was whan that Argus took his sleepe,
And seyde hym thus, To Atthenes shaltow wende,
Ther is thee shapen of thy wo an ende.
And with that word Arcite wook and sterte,
Now trewely how soore that me smerte,
Quod he, To Atthenes right now wol I fare,
Ne for the drede of deeth shal I nat spare
To se my lady that I love and serve;
In hir presence I recche nat to sterve.
And with that word he caughte a greet mirrour
And saugh that chaunged was al his colour
And saugh his visage al in another kynde;
And right anon it ran hym in his mynde,
That sith his face was so disfigured
Of maladye, the which he hadde endured,
He myghte wel, if that he bar hym lowe,
Lyve in Atthenes evermore unknowe,
And seen his lady wel ny day by day.
And right anon he chaunged his array,
And cladde hym as a powre laborer,
And al allone, save only a squier
That knew his privetee and al his cas,
Which was disguised povrely as he was,
To Atthenes is he goon the nexte way.
And to the court he wente upon a day,
And at the gate he profreth his servyse
To drugge and drawe, what so men wol devyse.
And shortly of this matere for to seyn,
He fil in office with a chamberleyn,
The which that dwellynge was with Emelye,
for he was wys, and koude soone espye
Of every servaunt which that serveth here,
Wel koude he hewen wode, and water bere,
for he was yong and myghty for the nones,
And therto he was long and big of bones
To doon that any wight kan hym devyse.
YEEER or two he was in this servyse,
Page of the chambre of Emelye the brighte,
And Philostrate he seyde that he highte,
But half so wel beloved a man as he
Ne was ther nevere in court of his degree;
He was so gentil of condicioun
That thurghout al the court was his renoun.
They seyden that it were a charitee
That Theseus wolde enhauncen his degree,
And putten hym in worshipful servyse,
Theras he myghte his vertu exercise.
And thus withinne a while his name is spronge,
Bothe of his dedes and his goode tonge,
That Theseus hath taken hym so neer,
That of his chambre he made hym a squier,
And yaf him gold to mayntene his degree;
And eek men broghte hym out of his contree,
from yeer to yeer, ful pryvely, his rente;
But honestly and slyly he it spente,
That no man wondred how that he it hadde.
And thre yeer in this wise his lif he ladde

And bar hym so in pees, and eek in werre,
Ther was no man that Theseus hath derre.
AND in this blisse lete I now Arcite
And speke I wole of Palamon a lite.
In derknesse horrible, and strong prison
Thise seven yeer hath seten Palamon,
forpyned, what for wo and for distresse;
Who feeleth double soor and hevynesse
But Palamon? that love destreyneyth so,
That wood out of his wit he goth for wo;
And eek therto he is a prisoner
Perpetuelly, nocht only for a yer.
Who koude ryme in Englyssh proprely
his martirdom? forsothe it am nat I;
Therefore I passe as lightly as I may.
IT fel that in the seventh yer in May,
The thridde nyght, as olde bookes seyn
That al this storie tellen moore pleyne,
Were it by aventure or destynce,
As whan a thyng is shapen it shal be,
That soone after the mydnyght, Palamoun,
By helpyng of a freend brak his prisoun
And fleeth the citee faste as he may go,
for he hade yewe his gayler drynke so
Of a clarree, maad of a certeyn wyn,
Of narcotikes, and opie of Thebes fyn,
That al that nyght, thogh that men wolde him
shake,
The gayler sleepe, he myghte nat awake.
And thus he fleeth, as faste as evere he may,
The nyght was short, and faste by the day,
That nedes cost he moot himselfen hyde,
And til a grove faste ther bisyde,
With dredeful foot than stalketh Palamoun,
for shortly, this was his opinioun,
That in that grove he wolde hym hyde al day,
And in the nyght thanne wolde he take his way
To Thebesward, his freendes for to preyre
On Theseus to helpe him to werreye;
And shortly, outhere he wolde lese his lif
Or wynnen Emelye unto his wyf.
This is the effect, and his entente pleyne.
Now wol I turne to Arcite ageyn,
That litel wiste how ny that was his care,
Til that fortune had broght him in the snare.
The bisy larke, messenger of day,
Salueth in hir song the morwe gray,
And fry Phebus riseth up so brighte
That al the orient laugheth of the lighte,
And with his stremes dryeth in the greves
The silver dropes, hangyng on the leves.
And Arcite that is in the court roial,
With Theseus, his squier principal,
Is risen, and looketh on the myrie day;
And for to doon his observaunce to May,
Remembryng on the poynt of his desir,
He on a courser, startlyng as the fir,
Is riden in to the feedes hym to pleye.
Out of the court, were it a myle or tweye;
And to the grove of which that I yow tolde,
By aventure, his wey he gan to holde,
To maken hym a gerland of the greves,
Were it of wodebynde, or hawethorn leves,



And loude he song ageyn the sonne shene:
HY, with alle thy floures & thy grene,
Welcome be thou, faire, fresshe May,
In hope that I som grene gete may.
And from his courser with a lusty herte
Into a grove ful hastily he sterte,
And in a path he rometh up and down,
Theras by aventure this Palamoun
Was in a bussch, that no man myghte hym se,
for soore afered of his deeth was he.
Nothing ne knew he that it was Arcite,
God woot he wolde have throwed it ful lite.
But sooth is seyde, gon sithen many yeres,
That feeld hath eyen, & the wode hath eres;
It is ful fair a man to bere hym evene,
for al day meeteth men at unset stevene.
ful litel woot Arcite of his felawe
That was so ny to herkenen al his sawe,
for in the bussch he sitteth now ful stille.
WHAN that Arcite hadde romed al his
file,
And songen al the roundel lustily,
Into a studie he fil all sodeynly,
As doon thise lovers in hir queynte geres,
Now in the crope, now down in the breres,
Now up, now down, as boket in a welle.
Right as the Friday, soothly for to telle,
Now it shyneth, and now it reyneth faste,

Right so kan geery Venus overcaste
The hertes of hir folk; right as hir day
Is gereful, right so chaungeth she array,
Selde is the Friday al the wowke ylike.
Whan that Arcite had songe, he gan to sike,
And sette hym down withouten any moore:
Allas, quod he, that day that I was bore!
How longe, Juno, thurgh thy crueltee,
Woltow werreyen Thebes the citee?
Allas, ybroght is to confusioun
The blood roial of Cadme and Amphion,
Of Cadmus, which that was the firste man
That Thebes bulde, or first the toun bigan,
And of the citee first was crowned kyng;
Of his lynage am I, and his ofspryng
By verray ligne, as of the stok roial;
And now I am so caytyf and so thral,
That he that is my mortal enemy,
I serve hym as his squier povrely,
And yet dooth Juno me wel moore shame,
for I dar nocht biknowe myn owene name,
But theras I was wont to highte Arcite,
Nowhighte I Philostrate, nocht worth a myte.
Allas, thou felle Mars! allas, Juno!
Thus hath youre ire oure kynrede al fordo,
Save only me, and wrecched Palamoun,
That Theseus martireth in prisoun,
And over al this, to sleen me outrely,